

Artistry Abroad BY ELAINA LOVELAND

Creative expression crosses boundaries. And students pursuing artistic degree programs can develop themselves as artists by learning from other cultures. Immersion in the artistic environments of cities like Paris and Florence can provide students with an opportunity to realize their creative potential.

Jeremiah Albrecht, a furniture design major at the Minneapolis College of Art and Design, spent a semester abroad in Florence, Italy, to do an independent

senior project studying furniture design and marble sculpture.

“My experience in Florence was life-changing,” Jeremiah recalls. “I was engulfed by thousands of years of art history. Art and design was everywhere. During the day you could walk down any street and see something from your art history book.”

Not only did the accessibility of viewing famous works of art leave an impression on Jeremiah, but being on his own gave him a new sense of personal responsibility that positively influenced his learning experience.

“This freedom actually made me work harder than I would have in the States. When you are in a strange environment and become overwhelmed, you tend to focus on the task at hand,” he says.

Admittedly, “the language barrier was tough at first” for Jeremiah, but many students spoke English. “My two professors didn’t speak any English so I sketched and drew my way through,” Jeremiah says. “It made my drawing and problem-solving skills improve dramatically and reaffirmed to me that art is a universal language.”

Carolina Spielmann was studying graphic design at the Universidad de Buenos Aires and decided she should take a year to study abroad. Originally, she was intending to attend Parsons University in New York City until she discovered that the institution had a branch campus in Paris, where she went instead.

“At Parsons Paris, I discovered a multicultural and international environment that conquered me, but also I was able to do what I always wanted to do: be a painter,” Carolina says. “In Argentina, it is not easy to become a painter and creative activities are less respected than in France. And being in Paris was stimulating, not only because of the exhibitions and museum, but also because I could see that I had a chance of becoming a professional artist.”

What was intended to be a one-year

study abroad experience became much more. Carolina decided to stay and finish her degree in Paris rather than return to Argentina. Before graduating, she was already selling her paintings at the Toast Gallery, which enabled her to do other artistic projects with sponsorships from Heineken and Habitat for Humanity. She has since become a professional artist doing projects in stage design, book illustrations, and furniture design.

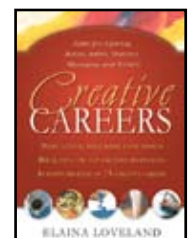
The experience of studying art abroad allows students to broaden their horizons in terms of knowledge of art and culture in societies unlike their own as well as help them further develop their artistic skills to reach their potential and start careers after their college graduation.

“It’s amazing how some countries can appreciate art more than others,” Jeremiah says. “We [the United States] have such a young history of art compared to northern Europe. They seem to place more value on teaching arts to their students. The design course I had taken had students significantly younger and more technically skilled than the students in the United States.”

Today, Jeremiah is an interior designer working at Worrell, a product development firm providing customer research and product definition, industrial design, engineering, user interface design, and branding in Minneapolis.

“Since coming back I’ve attributed much of my artistic growth to the study abroad program. My ideation and conceptualizing skills significantly improved,” Jeremiah says. “More importantly, I have learned how to adapt in new environments and use them as inspiration.”

► *Elaina Loveland is the author of Creative Careers: Paths for Aspiring Actors, Artists, Dancers, Musicians, and Writers. Visit www.elainaloveland.com for more information.*



i Even if your college or university offers an art program abroad, you may also want to consider other options based on where you want to study. The art capitals of the world are Amsterdam, Florence, London, Milan, New York City, Paris, Rome, and Vienna, but there are many other places you might want to study in too. You can find a variety of programs at www.studyabroad.com.

Before choosing a program, make sure you get the answers to these questions to ensure you will gain the most from your artistic experience overseas.

- Will you be taught by well-known artists?
- Will the language of instruction be in English? If it is in another language, do you have the prerequisite language level to enroll in the course?
- Will you be taking classes with students from your host country as well as students from the United States?
- Will you have lectures or other guided tours of the city’s artistic masterpieces? If not, are you comfortable discovering art on your own?
- Will there be any opportunities for internship programs at art galleries or master classes by renowned artists who are not regular faculty?
- Will there be any opportunities to exhibit your work at the conclusion of the program or in local art galleries of your host city? —Elaina Loveland